

**Statement of U.S. Senator Byron L. Dorgan**  
**Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**  
**Hearing on the Nomination of David Anderson**  
**Wednesday, October 22, 2003**

Chairman Campbell and Vice Chairman Inouye, I want to thank you for convening this hearing on the nomination of Mr. David Anderson to be Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior. I don't know a great deal about Mr. Anderson, other than that he is truly a "self-made" man, so I am looking forward to hearing from him directly about his thoughts and philosophies on matters of concern to Indian people. Let me make a couple of brief points.

One of the most important responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs is to serve as one of the federal government's primary trustees for the trust assets of Indian tribes and individual Indians. Perhaps more importantly, I also view the Assistant Secretary as an advocate on behalf of Indian people within the Administration. As my colleagues on the Committee know, the United States has a trust responsibility to protect and to enhance the resources of the Indian people, and quite frankly, our track record has not always been very good.

I am particularly concerned about the unmet health, education, and other needs that exist in Indian country. I frequently visit the Indian reservations in North Dakota and meet with the tribal chairs, men, women, and children who live there. The conditions in some cases on these reservations are very much like those of a Third World country. The health care needs are devastating. The unemployment rates in some cases are as high as 50, 60, and 70 percent because these areas are so remote and there are simply no jobs. And the quality of housing and education regrettably is not up to the standards it should be.

We have made some progress in the last few years in providing increased health, education, housing, law enforcement, and other funding to meet these needs. But we are still nowhere near where the level of funding needs to be, and really, all we have done is to restore funding to the levels where it was prior to cuts in Indian programs in the 1980s and early 1990s. The ability of Congress to continue to make progress in meeting the funding needs of Indian country will depend in good measure on the leadership that the Administration provides in submitting budgets that reflect the actual needs. Unfortunately, budgets that have been submitted in the past frequently have come nowhere near to meeting these needs, and I hope the Bush Administration will do better in the future.

We simply must keep the promises made to tribes, so that tribal governments are able to advance toward self-determination. Whether we keep these promises is in large part a result of the leadership of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. I will be pushing the Assistant Secretary, Secretary Norton and the Bush Administration to do more to uphold our obligations to Native Americans, particularly in regard to providing desperately needed health care, education, and housing to Indian people, promoting economic development, and furthering self-governance.

I expect that Mr. Anderson will be confirmed. I generally believe that presidents ought to have reasonably wide latitude in selecting their Executive Branch appointees. Therefore, I will look forward to working with Mr. Anderson, especially on issues that are of importance to Native Americans in North Dakota and across the nation.